

## PRESS RELEASE

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### **SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS COMPLEMENT INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF ART HISTORIANS**

Two special exhibitions of 16th- and 17th-century Dutch, Flemish, and German prints and drawings, from the collections of The Cleveland Museum of Art, are being presented in conjunction with an international conference of the Historians of Netherlandish Art which will be held at the Museum from October 26 through 28, 1989. The exhibitions, **Northern Landscape Traditions: 16th- and 17th-Century Prints and Drawings** and **Netherlandish Drawings from the Permanent Collection**, will be on view at the Museum from October 10 through December 31, 1989.

Artists working in the Netherlands and Germany during the 16th and 17th centuries were among the first Western artists to depict landscape for its own sake and not just as background for religious, historical, or mythological subjects. These artists developed themes and compositions which have remained the basis of most landscape art to the present day.

**Northern Landscape Traditions: 16th- and 17th-Century Prints and Drawings**, which includes eighty-three works, examines the development of landscape as an independent art form, concentrating on the achievements of the great Dutch landscape artists and their influential German and Flemish colleagues. Because artists experimented on paper before they painted in oil, their innovations in landscape art generally appeared first in drawings and prints. Cheap to produce and easy to distribute, prints spread the compositions of the most inventive landscape artists across Europe.

An early type of landscape was the panorama, a view from an elevated position encompassing a vast area that is recorded in considerable detail. Such map-like depictions of landscape as the engraving of Pieter Brueghel the Elder's Sollicitudo Rustica (Country Concerns) (ca. 1555-58), where the land seems tilted up for inspection, can be contrasted with later, more naturalistic panoramas such as Rembrandt's etched View of Amsterdam (1640), where the point of view is low and space and atmosphere count as much as detail. Many early landscape prints also describe seasonal activities, such as planting or harvesting, often associated with the months of the year. Jan van de Velde's four etchings, from a twelve-part series on the months, are fine examples.

Dutch and Flemish artists who traveled to Italy to study were impressed by its clear, warm light and by the beauty of the Roman Campagna with its picturesque disposition of trees and antique ruins. Some responded with views of actual Italian sites; others composed idyllic scenes like the Arcadian landscape executed in chiaroscuro woodcut attributed to Esaias van de Velde. Low Country artists also depicted wild, mountainous scenery, both real and imaginary. They found inspiration in the Alpine views of Pieter Brueghel and the forested landscapes of German artists, such as Albrecht Altdorfer, whose etching of a landscape with two pines, dating from about 1515-22, is the earliest pure landscape in the exhibition.

In 1609 the United Provinces of the Netherlands gained independence from Spain, and Dutch artists looked at their countryside with renewed pride, picturing its canals, dunes, woods, towns, and harbors. An etching by Willem Buytewech depicts the ruins of the Castle Huys te Kleef, a manor house near Haarlem destroyed by Spanish soldiers in 1573. In Dutch art, ruins often symbolized the transience of human endeavor; here they served as a reminder of Holland's struggle for

independence. Ludolf Backhuysen's etchings of the bustling port of Amsterdam, from a series of landscapes made in 1701, reflect the growing prosperity of the Dutch republic, which owed its wealth to its merchant fleet.

Rural life and peasant cottages were other favorite subjects. Dutch artists often held up country life as a model of virtue or simplicity, whether depicting shepherds in peaceful harmony with nature, as in the etchings of Claes Berchem and Paulus Potter, or hard-working peasants as in Pieter van Laer's etching of a herdsman driving two buffalo.

One section of the exhibition compares works by Rembrandt, who etched and painted only a few landscapes, and Jacob van Ruisdael, who made landscape painting his life's work. Each viewed nature differently. In The Three Trees, an etching, engraving, and drypoint of 1643, Rembrandt uses strong contrasts of light and dark to focus attention on the trees which dominate the right side of the composition. In Ruisdael's etchings of heavily wooded landscapes, tonal differences are less pronounced and the artist's wiry line directs the viewer's eye everywhere, to the smallest leaf and branch.

Another major Dutch landscape artist is Hercules Seghers, an isolated figure whose techniques and compositions were highly unusual and experimental. His etching, The Enclosed Valley, which depicts a desolate, fantastic landscape, is printed on linen and hand colored.

Many works in this exhibition have been extracted from sets of prints, but two series are displayed in full. The various landscapes in Herman Naiwynx's set of eight etchings may represent the diverse scenery a traveler would experience on a long trip. The four prints in Herman van Swanevelt's series of etchings and engravings, The Rest on the Flight into Egypt, depict the Holy Family at different stages of their

journey but no longer the main focus of the composition as they would have been in earlier versions of this subject. Now they are tiny figures subordinate to the drama of the land around them.

**Northern Landscape Traditions** was organized by E. Bruce Robertson, assistant curator of American painting at the Museum and assistant professor at Case Western Reserve University, and Sabine Kretzschmar, curatorial assistant in the Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings.

**Netherlandish Drawings from the Permanent Collections** presents seventeen of the Museum's finest 16th- and 17th-century Dutch and Flemish drawings, primarily figural compositions and seascapes. Highlights include Rembrandt's expressive pen and ink drawing, Tobias Healing His Father's Blindness, exhibited with drawings by three artists who were his followers; Adriaen van de Velde's sensitive red chalk rendering of a Seated Peasant Woman; and Rubens's bold conception of the Reconciliation of the Romans and Sabines, executed in pen and ink.

Several unattributed drawings are noteworthy. A sheet with three studies of a woman wearing an elaborate headdress by an anonymous Netherlandish artist, dating from about 1500, was once owned by Rubens and retouched by him. A design for a silver bowl by an anonymous 17th-century Dutch artist depicts marine motifs and a scene with Neptune, sea gods, and nymphs. Works in this exhibition were selected by Michael Miller, assistant curator in the Museum's Department of Prints and Drawings.

A separate press release on the international conference of the Historians of Netherlandish Art, whose sessions are free and open to the public, is attached.

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